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## THE OLD TESTAMENT ILLUSTRATED TO THE LIFE.

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By CLIFTON HARBY LEVY,  
New York City.

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LIGHT on the Bible is light indeed to the multitude. Yet it is difficult to get just the right, true light on this the greatest of books. The experts in the pulpit and outside of it are trying in every way to make the Bible live for the people, and they welcome every aid to this work. The latest aid that can be summoned, and that which is in accord with the spirit of the age that strives to picture everything, is the art of the painter; but unfortunately few of the great painters have devoted their brush to sacred subjects; or, if so, they have confined themselves to the painting of Madonnas and crucifixions and let the remainder of Holy Writ go almost unportrayed.

When some six years ago J. James Tissot exhibited a large collection of pictures illustrating the life of Christ, thousands of persons flocked to see them, and were impressed with the sincerity and truthfulness of the work. They saw that the artist had devoted time, energy, and genius toward the realization of Jesus as he actually was, and that he had succeeded in presenting a more convincing life of Jesus than had ever appeared before. It was only after ten years of careful study, and constant travel in Palestine and Egypt, that this artist, who already stood among the leading painters of Paris, had dared to complete the most truthful pictures possible of Jesus and his times. They interested the world of Christian believers. The collection was purchased by the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences.

But Tissot felt that his work was not yet complete. Here was Jesus indeed, but where was all that great preparation historically and ethically which led up to him? The New Testament is built upon the Old, and he who would understand Jesus must also know the patriarchs and the prophets of the Old Dispensation. So Tissot undertook the colossal task of illustrating the entire Old Testament. He worked with feverish haste, feeling the approach of death itself;

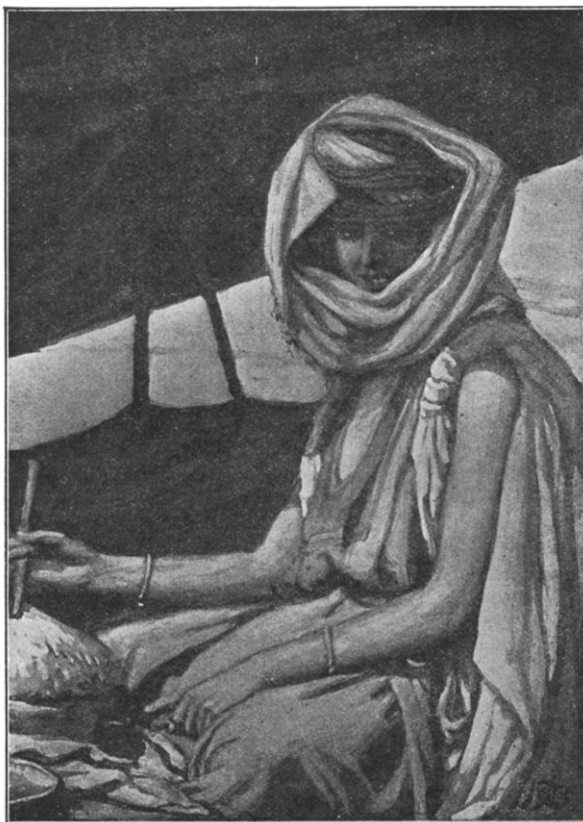


"GOLIATH'S CHALLENGE."

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—Tissot.

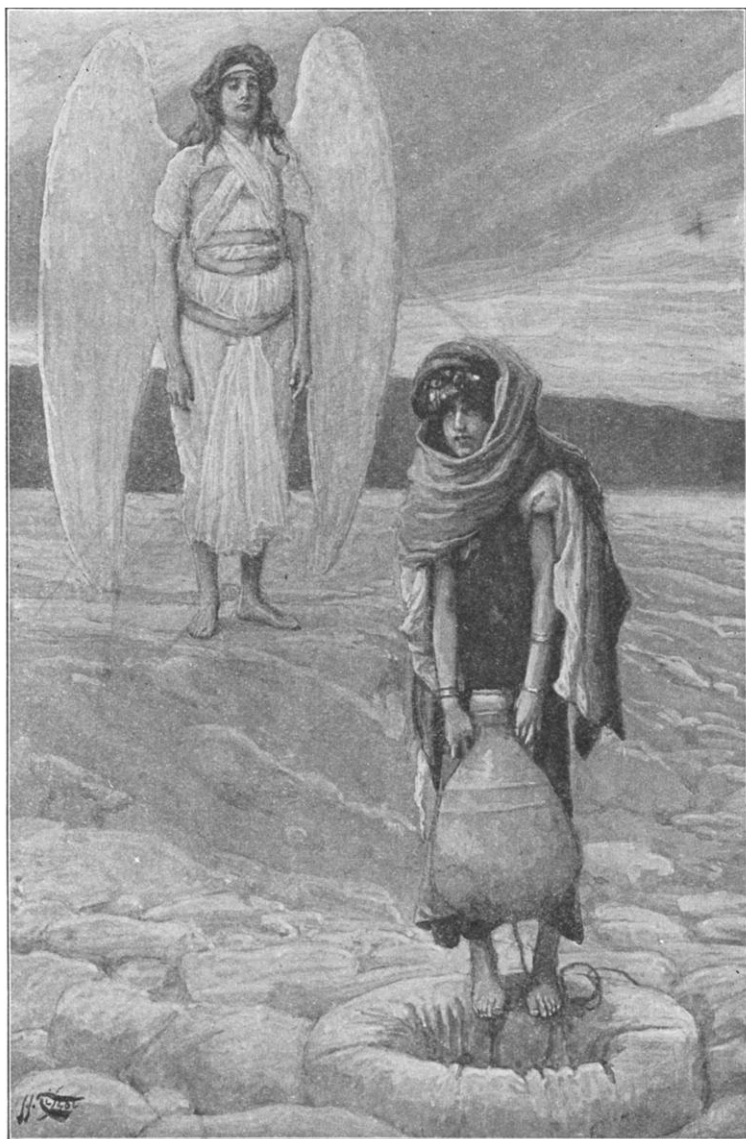
but before the icy hand of paralysis was upon him he succeeded in painting some four hundred pictures based upon the text of the Old Testament. These pictures are to be exhibited throughout the United States within the next two or three years, beginning with this autumn, and to be reproduced in color in book form, with the neces-



SARAH.

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sary accompanying text. These paintings must prove of tremendous value to students of the Bible as living illustrations of the Old Testament, for the artist is a realist as well as a man of imagination. He presents the real background of the Old Testament, filling it up with actual types as gathered by him during years of study of the



HAGAR AND THE ANGEL. Copyright, 1904, by de Brunoff.

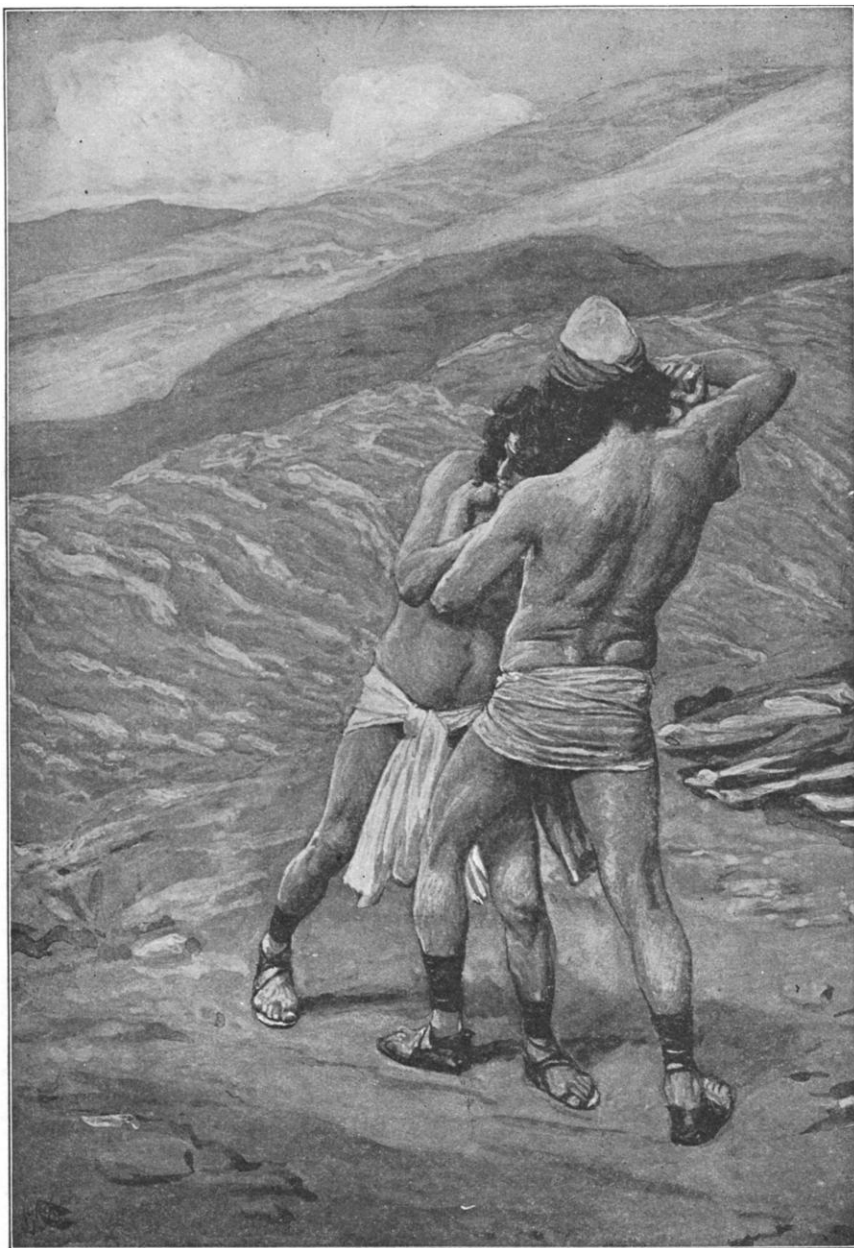
“unchanging Orient.” It is a reconstruction of the life of the Old Testament, as complete as was possible, considering the distance at which the artist stood from the times he depicts. That distance is not so great for the Orient as it would be anywhere else in the world; for the sheik of today is much like the sheik of three or four thousand years ago; the deserts and mountains have not changed; even the tents of the twentieth century of the Christian era are similar to those of the twentieth century before it. Tissot found it necessary to study the Jew and the Arab at home in Palestine and in the desert, and he spared no pains to gather every detail of scenery, of types of character, and of architecture, that his pictures might be as nearly true as possible.

The work of this artist is noticeable for its conscientiousness as to detail, and though some archæologists may raise a query here or there as to the design of a rug, or the introduction of a cat, the general result cannot be far from the truth.

Here at last are pictures of the Israelites at every turn of their fortunes, just as if they had been sketched by a series of artists who accompanied them from the beginning of their existence to the close of their biblical career. The visitors to the exhibition of the paintings, or those who turn the pages of the volumes containing the pictures, will feel as if they were looking at the panorama of Old Testament life from origin to conclusion. Those who know their Bible will be delighted to view every scene and every character depicted in all the vividness and reality of color before their eyes, the life of the biblical age reconstructed upon the background of the actual scenery of Palestine, and made up from actual types preserved to this day in the “perpetual cast.”

Starting with the very beginning of all things, the visitor will see the earth rise into being, and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The earliest tragedies are played out before his eyes, and with the driving out of the hapless pair follows the first murder of brother by brother.

Noah follows the building of the Tower of Babel, and Shem, Ham, and Japheth are to be seen before they go into the ark. That greatest of ancient vessels is seen in the building, and also when the animals enter it. At last the deluge is upon the world, and Tissot shows the



JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL.

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rest of mankind floating to death on logs, while the ark is still safe. It lands on the mount, and Noah sacrifices while the rainbow appears in the heavens.

Passing to the patriarchs, the artist shows us Abram on his travels with Sarah and all his camels and retainers; and then we see the destruction of Sodom, the sending away of Hagar, and her life in the desert. All the history of the sacrifice of Isaac, the securing of his wife, and the birth of Esau and Jacob, is told in picture after picture. There is that famous sale of the birthright when the hungry Esau barter his right for a mess of pottage that the wily Jacob prepares. Isaac is deceived into blessing the younger son for the elder, but Jacob flees the vengeance of his brother, and is exiled in Laban's house for many years. At last he returns with wives and flocks, and is welcomed by his forgiving brother.

The pretty story of Joseph is told in full detail, from the search for his brethren and the relating of his dreams to the sale into Egypt and his rise to power there.

The story of the freeing of the Israelites offers splendid material to the painter, and he shows us each step from the birth of Moses to his exile into Midian, his return to Egypt, the plaguing of the Egyptians and the final escape of the Israelites through the Red Sea.

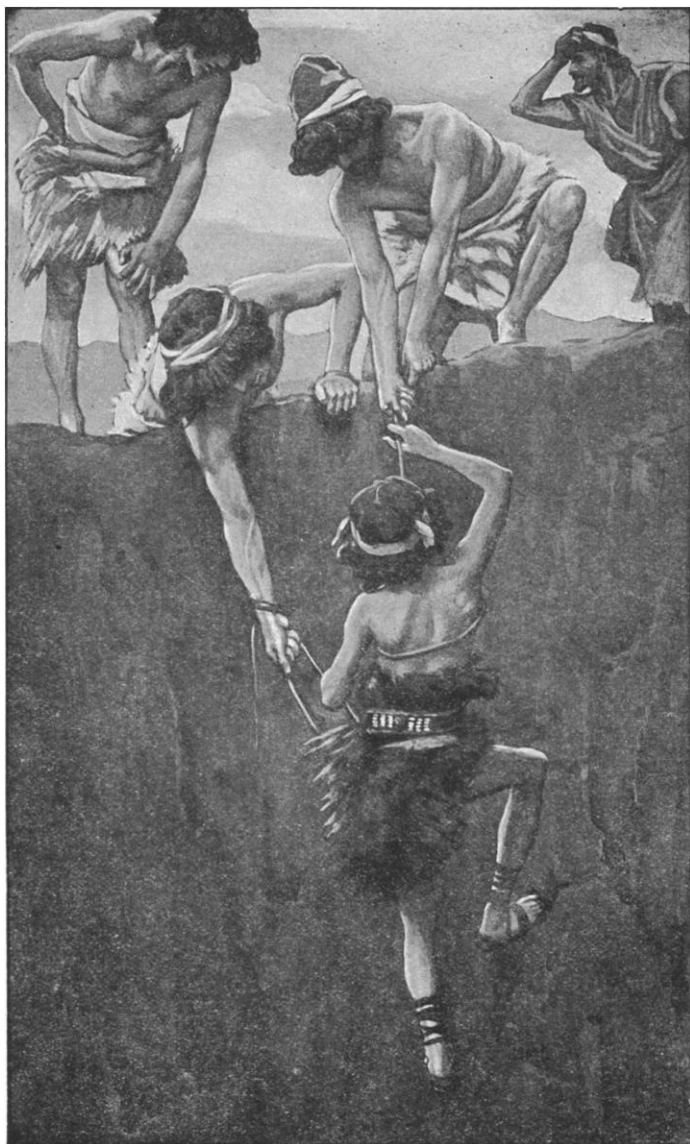
They are followed all through the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, where they received the Ten Commandments, and at last came to the land of Palestine, into which Moses was not permitted to enter.

The fortunes of the conquerors are followed from the assault upon Jericho to that battle with the Amorites when Joshua said: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon!" He meets the giants only to defeat them, and the whole land is soon in his hands.

The troublous time of the Judges is pictured in every detail, not one of those historic heroes escaping depiction, from Othniel to Gideon and Jephthah; and even that awful death of Abimelech at the hand of a woman who threw down a piece of a millstone on his head is drawn with power and conviction. There, too, is Eli—and there are his sons.

Samuel appears first as the slender lad hearing the call of God





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JOSEPH LOWERED INTO THE PIT.

and later as the prophet who selects the kings of Israel. Saul is chosen, and, when he fails, David is brought forward. There is the shepherd lad, who first tries on the armor of Saul and then, discarding it, goes forth to meet the Philistine champion, Goliath, with his shepherd's sling. He is seen cutting off the giant's head with his own sword, and later fleeing from the jealousy of Saul.

David and his men betake themselves to the mountains, and there on more than one occasion he has Saul at his mercy, but he spares him. Jonathan and David appear together, and Absalom is seen hanging by the hair of his head from the tree. At last Saul passes away, and David is welcomed to the capital. He builds up the little kingdom, and paves the way for the glorious rule of his son Solomon, who appears with the Queen of Sheba, dedicating the temple, giving judgment, and in all those other similar scenes.

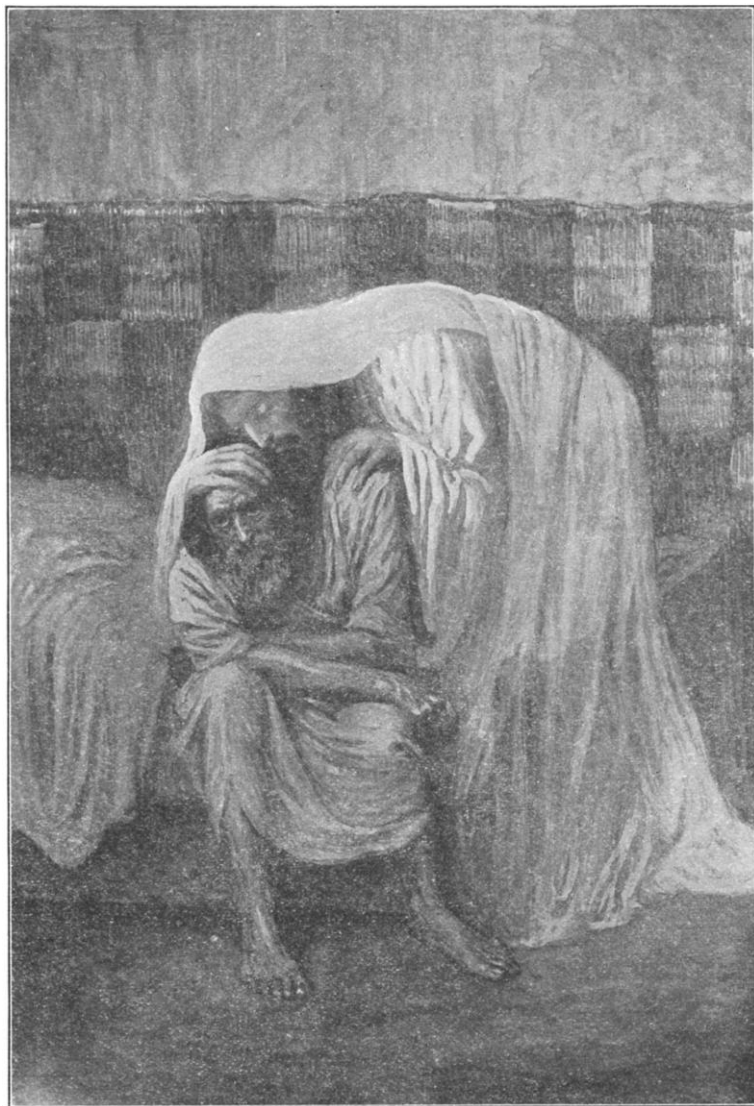
The time of the Kings is chronicled in all its details, and Elijah and Elisha play their part. At last the kingdom falls of its own weight; Jerusalem is taken, and the vessels of the temple are carried away to Babylon.

Thither Tissot follows the Israelites, painting them as they hung their harps on the willows, and at last reaching the activity of Daniel. This hero is fully presented, and Belshazzar appears asking to have his dream interpreted, and the writing on the wall explained to him. Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, and even into the fiery furnace, but escapes unscathed. The story might be read from Tissot's pictures, so graphically do they illustrate the text.

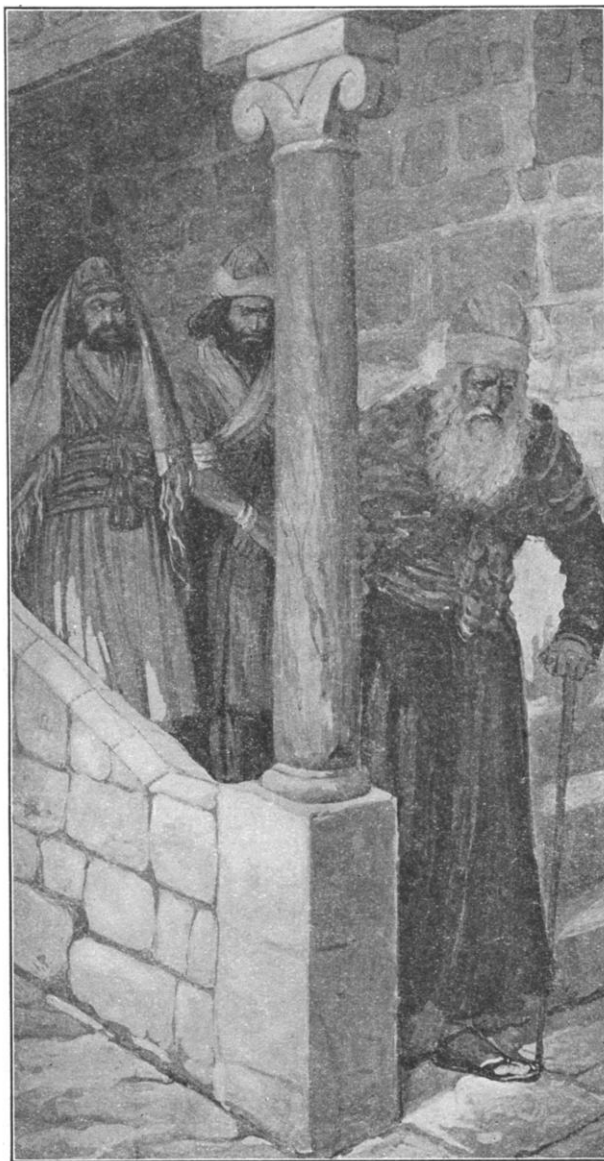
The return of the Jews, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple under Jeremiah, are all painted, and the domination of the prophets is made clear by a number of striking character-drawings of these important personages who helped to make the later history of the people. No less than sixteen of the prophets have been painted by Tissot, each one expressing the spirit of his work as it is preserved in the Bible, the only guide that the artist could have. Here is not only Moses from birth to death, but Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and each one of the minor prophets—Haggai, Micah, Malachi, and all—so powerfully drawn that they may be identified by those who know their writings well. They are the typical preachers of that ancient day, worthily preserved through their words.



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MOSES LAID IN THE BULLRUSHES.



GOD IS WITH THE AFFLICTED. Copyright, 1904, by de Brunoff.



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SAMUEL AND HIS TWO SONS.

Many of the psalms have been illustrated, and the book of Job is not forgotten. Ruth and her mother-in-law, and Boaz, appear in several sympathetic pictures, and that remarkable story of Esther is portrayed with sympathy and feeling.

It is like meeting old friends, the oldest friends that the religious world has, to view these pictures. They will send many beholders back to the Bible to refresh their memory of the characters and stories painted there. The influence of the pictures upon the people cannot fail to be intense, for that is the character of the work as a whole.

Tissot follows the Bible with a faithfulness that is almost literal, yet he cannot help reading between the lines, and sometimes the imagination of the painter suggests most acceptable interpretations. The ordinary reader is apt to think of Cain and Abel as almost of an age, on account of the closeness of the narrative in Genesis, yet Tissot's picture suggests that Cain was far older, and the observer is apt to be converted to his view. When Tissot paints the Jews in Egypt in a synagogue, he seems to be perpetrating an anachronism; yet that the Jews, or more properly Israelites, as they were then, had their places of worship, even though they may not have been the counterpart of the later synagogues, there can be little doubt.

These are cited as instances of the originality of the artist's method, the value and suggestiveness of which are not to be underrated.

Viewed as a whole, the pictures must be considered dignified and worthy of the subjects covered by them, and the influence that will be exerted through the exhibition of the originals and their reproduction in book form must be far-reaching.